The Port OF Hueneme

committed to COMMUNITY

A NOTE FROM THE PORT OF HUENEME

Bunkering Explained: Why You May Sometimes Smell Fuel at the Port

A plain-language look at ship refueling at the Port—what bunkering is, why it happens here, and what independent testing found about its impact on air quality.

What is bunkering?

Bunkering is simply refueling a ship — the marine equivalent of filling up a car. A fuel barge comes to the Port, ties up alongside a docked vessel, and pumps fuel from the barge's into the ship's tanks through hoses.

When and how often

FREQUENCY	TIMING	DURATION
Typically midweek, 1 or 2 times a week	Late night or early morning	3 to 5 hours per operation

Why the Port does this

Hueneme's refrigerated container ships need to refuel to keep their tight schedules. Refrigerated produce is perishable. It is critical to keep deliveries on schedule to supply fresh food to our local stores and restaurants. Bunkering here saves days worth of time, and critically, keeps the Port cost-competitive with other West Coast ports. Remember, the Port operates like a small business and has to offer cost effective services that keep customers coming back. Port trade supports 25,000 regional jobs and local agriculture.

- Produce Arriving: bananas, blueberries, avocados, pineapples, mangos from South and Central America.
- Departing: Local avocados, citrus, and US exports including potatoes, cheese and wine.

The Port does not manufacture anything. We don't move or store hazardous waste. We are a busy transportation hub moving critical commodities into our US supply chain that touches 17+ US states.

Questions or concerns? We want to hear from you.

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Safe. Tested. Measured.

The Port hired an independent environmental testing firm to sample the air directly at — and within 8 feet of — the ship's vents during bunkering operations. Sampling was deliberately conducted aboard the vessel near fueling vents to represent the highest potential exposure locations.

Result: fuel vapors were present, but every compound measured was below California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) 8-hour Time Weighted Permissible Exposure Limits (8-hr TWA) and recommended NIOSH and ACGIH occupational guidelines— the same standards that protect people working closest to fueling operations.

Since 2009, California has required ships travelling through its waters and berthing at its Ports to burn some of the cleanest fuels in the world. This California rule for sulfur content is set 5 times lower than what is internationally allowed. The 2009 rule, the most aggressive ship fuel rule in the world at the time, drove a 97% reduction in sulfur which enabled huge reductions in SOx and particulate emissions at Ports including Hueneme.

Why can I smell it then?

The human nose can detect some odors at concentrations far below levels known to cause health effects. Hydrogen sulfide, the familiar "rotten egg" smell, is one example. Federal health data show that people can detect hydrogen sulfide at roughly 0.0005–1.5 ppm in air. OSHA's workplace exposure limit sits at 20 ppm — or 1,000 times higher. Smelling something is not the same as being exposed to a harmful amount of it.

Sources: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR); U.S. OSHA hydrogen sulfide standards.

How bunkering works, step by step

1. Fuel barge arrives and ties up alongside the docked vessel.
2. Crew connects hoses between the barge and the ship's fuel tanks.
3. Fuel is pumped over several hours while tanks vent as designed.
4. Hoses are disconnected and the barge departs.

Are there other local odor sources we could be smelling?

Yes, there are many other things happening around the Port of Hueneme that can create odors.

1. Industrial manufacturing activities in the City which vent chemical or burning smells.
2. Paper recycling facility on Perkins road which recycles cardboard packaging.
3. Sewage treatment plant on Perkins road which makes a variety of odors.
4. Naval activity – the US Military is currently very busy locally and globally. These activities include ship bunkering and fuel use for a wide range of equipment while engaged in keeping our nation safe.

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